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# Hitchhiking

Anick-Marie BOUCHARD





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Written by Anick-Marie Bouchard

Published by the Neo-Nomad Collective

Avignon, France


[www.neo-nomad.org](http://www.neo-nomad.org)

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# What Is Hitchhiking?

**Hitchhiking** is soliciting a ride from a car or a truck driver. It is a **spontaneous** exchange (in contrast with to planned ride-sharing) and is generally **free**, except for some countries where public transportation is scarce. The hitchhiker generally signals the driver with the hand, or requests a ride directly by asking him/her.





## Understanding the Context

The '70s were probably the golden years of hitchhiking. Veterans remember: "Over forty hitchhikers at Dreilinden (gate to West Berlin)", "about thirty at Porte d'Orléans (in Paris)." Are the hitching days over? Not so sure! Despite strongly negative media coverage of the technique, it is still possible to find dozens of hitchhikers queuing after a rock festival (such as the Roskilde Festival in Denmark), in Vietnam (where it is a means of public transportation just like any other), or during a race like the fund-raising event Race to Prague or Race to Morocco organized yearly by the charity *Link Community Development*. Who said nobody raises their thumb anymore?



# Relevance

## Economical

- No need to spell it out for you: hitchhiking as a means of transportation is generally **free**.
- In countries where private vehicle ownership is inaccessible, petrol prices too high for most people and public transportation is deficient, you might be asked to contribute your share of the fuel. This is often the case in Latin America, in Asia and in Africa, but also in some Eastern European countries. The requested fee is usually much lower than a bus fare would be (if there even is a bus). It is also possible to hitchhike for free in some of these areas (not all of them!) by explaining that you are looking for a free ride. Make sure to inquire about the local customs beforehand.

## Ecological

- In principle, hitchhiking causes only a marginal rise in fuel consumption, i.e. the amount of fuel required to transport the weight of the extra passenger. Compared to the vehicle's weight, it is overall **negligible**. It is an optimization technique, meaning that it increases the efficiency of existing motorized transports by reducing the energy consumption per person.
- Drivers sometimes take detours to show you something amazing or even their grandmother's house. They might also drive you a bit further so that you're not stuck in dead-end or a place that's hard to get out of. In practice, there is an ecological footprint while hitchhiking, but it's **very low compared to other motorized means of transport**.

## Human

Generally, people first try out the technique because it's cheap and eco-friendly, but it's the human encounters that nourish the hardened hitcher.

- The relationship between the hitchhiker and the driver is **fleeting** and close to **anonymous**. For these reasons, discussion will generally be sincere, deep and direct. It is therefore a way to subtly discover the local culture: how people think, how they live, their dreams, what worries them, their wishes, their regrets...
- The people picking you up may come from all social backgrounds, which means that it's a very **diversified** sample. From the truck driver to the businessman, from the priest to the criminal, from the stripteaser to the illegal worker, from the immigrant to the purest local, each vehicle carries its distinct reality to discover, to question and to engage with.
- Hitchhiking is an ideal way to **learn and practice foreign languages**. Since it is essential to understand and be understood, no one really worries about making mistakes – there goes the shyness! It's an excellent way to break the ice, even if it sometimes leads to hilarious results...
- For his/her safety, the hitchhiker must learn to **be aware** of the driver, to read his/her body language and hidden messages, and confront his/her fears. In an intercultural context, this means constant evaluation of his/her own stand, of what is or is not acceptable. It is a good exercise in **communication, personal development and tolerance**.



## Legal Aspects

In most countries, it is legal to hitchhike. To our best knowledge, there are three general conditions under which hitchhiking could be illegal :

- ☛ **When pedestrians are not allowed to be walking on the road**, for example on emergency lanes on motorways.
- ☛ **When it is forbidden or dangerous for vehicles to stop where the hitchhiker is standing.** It is the most common situation – by prompting people to put themselves in a dangerous or illegal position, you are yourself breaking the law and may be arrested. It all depends on how the police sees it – if the traffic is very low, they might tolerate your presence regardless.
- ☛ **When it is expressly prohibited to solicit rides by means of hitchhiking.** This is the case in some parts of the United States, though not all of them (as it is sometimes believed). In some states, you are allowed on certain types of roads only, or it is not allowed around prisons, etc.

Finally, it goes without saying that you can be checked by the police at all times, for an I.D. check (if relevant) or for any offense that you might be suspected of: carrying drugs, illegal entry to the country, etc. It is important to cooperate with the authorities, to have practical knowledge of the local laws... and to have your papers in order.

It is however necessary to mention a few other things a hitchhiker should keep in mind when dealing with the authorities: ignorance or oppression from the police, corruption, grey areas of Law and current events such as terrorist attacks, recent investigations, paramilitary forces, armed conflict...

**Golden Rule : ask locals** (while putting their answer in perspective) **and other experienced hitchhikers.**

# Understand Basic Solicitation Techniques

## Passive Hitchhiking

Standing straight up by the side of the road, facing traffic, you signal with your hand (usually extending your arm, fist closed and thumb raised) to drivers passing by on your side. Ideally, vehicles would have enough space to be able to stop safely.

*One of the unwritten rules of passive hitchhiking is that **you get the first verbal contact** by asking the driver where he/she is going. As they answer, you briefly have the possibility have a brief chance to assess the situation: who are the passengers in the car, how do you feel about the situation. You have an **opportunity to refuse**: "Sorry, it's too far, too close, too out of the way, and I forgot to feed the dog at home..." It is of course a bit more complicated to explain refusal if you use a sign when hitchhiking...*

**Your assets:** Your smile, your visible clothing, your physical appearance, eye-contact with the your eyes meeting the driver's, your begging eyes or your hopeful look or begging eyes, a sign of the hand, or more generally, any non-verbal communication.

- ✓ This technique is usually good to leave a city, to get "on the road".
- ✗ No real direct contact, no possibility to talk to potential driver and no way to know if they are really going your way.

*A bus stop is often a perfect spot for passive hitchhiking. It can be a bit confusing for drivers, but at least they get a proper space in which they can stop safely.*

## Active Hitchhiking

Between two toll gates, close to the petrol pumps, or at a red traffic light, you take a few seconds to ask drivers directly where they are going and if they care to take you with them.

**Your assets:** Your smile, your physical appearance, your attitude, your social and language skills, your humor and sometimes your native country.

✓ This technique works best at service stations. When prompted directly, drivers are more aware of their opportunity to help another human being. They can also refuse, but then they need to make up an excuse and justify themselves. Anyway, they can hardly just ignore you (although sometimes they do!).

✓ It allows you to choose your drivers, especially at night when risks are higher, but also the vehicle according to the degree of comfort you are looking for and the direction in which they are likely to be going (judging by their license plate number).

✗ It requires some nerve and a great deal of self-confidence. You might feel like you are forcing people to take you, people who didn't really want to take you in the first place but felt they had little choice but to help you out.

✗ Implies that you are confident in making yourself understood by locals.

*Avoid knocking on cars' windows - it's a form of aggression that is hard to cope with. Try making the drivers aware of your presence by signs instead, and show your most beautiful smile...*

# Optimal Path

To figure out which is the best way to get to your destination, you first have to assess the road network between the two points.

**What is the most intuitive way to get from the starting point to the destination? Which roads carry the highest traffic volume?** The best hitchhiking spot is not always the shortest or the fastest. Imagine yourself in the shoes of drivers taking that road... For example, the most convenient on-ramp to the motorway may only be taken by people driving locally, not reach the motorway stretch that would really launch you on your way. It is sometimes useful to know which are the main truck roads, especially if you're planning long journeys. It's also clever sometimes to start in the "wrong" direction in order to reach a spot from which you can easily get started properly.

**What are the interchanges or major junctions on your way?** Big cities are very tricky to go around because they are a final destination for a lot of people. Plan ahead and try to foresee the places where you could get stuck: there is probably a simple way to avoid them.

**Is there a service station right before or nearby?** You might be able to find a spot right before the interchange or the city, and request a ride further than your obstacle, be it with a proper sign or by active hitchhiking.

**Are there alternative routes?** If they are not lengthening your way too much, remember that being flexible is sometimes worth it. Take the time to study the map and take note of the major road you wish to take, the major cities (especially useful to quickly determine the directions indicated on road signs), major or useful service stations. In addition to giving you proper knowledge of your planned journey, writing the directions down can be useful when there is no common language with a driver - they can at least attempt to read your notes and make some sense of them, instead of making you repeat your unpronounceable destination endlessly.

*Maps and driving directions websites can be quite helpful:*

- to visualize the way in or out of a town, as well as alternative itineraries;
- to look for service stations – target an area and search for “gas station”;
- the satellite and the street map view could help you find a starting spot according to the road configuration, the available space, the presence of a traffic light, etc.

Our favorite? Google Map : <http://maps.google.com>

## Finding a Spot

For passive hitchhiking, the ideal starting spot is a place where:

- there's enough space for a vehicle to stop safely;
- there is long stretch of road so that the driver can see you a long time in advance (>100 m) or for a long time (i.e. traffic light);
- there is regular long-distance traffic toward your destination or a proper intermediary stop;
- the flow of traffic is relatively slow and loose (<80 km/h) and it's not too hard for the driver to reenter traffic;
- there is enough light for people to see you and you can make eye contact with the driver;
- it is legal for a pedestrian to stand and for a vehicle to stop.

*If possible, choose a straight stretch where you can be seen from a distance and with enough space for drivers to pull over without compromising their own safety!*

In big cities, it's usually necessary to get out of the city center using public transportation. Try to imagine the most logical way from the

city center to your direction, then locate the service stations or the on-ramps. The most difficult part usually is finding enough space for people to pull over. See what your options are starting from the train station, the airport or from big shopping centers. For smaller towns, you often just have to walk towards your direction until you find a suitable spot.

Finding a new spot requires intuition, luck and good knowledge of the traffic flow. You may want to identify “known spots” where hitchhikers go regularly, as they are not only “tested and approved”, but local drivers are also more likely to expect hitchhikers there.. People share their spots and other experiences on collaborative websites and you might find an easy way out of your city on them. Check out **Hitchwiki.org** and **Digihitch.com**.

*Don't forget to share your your experiences  
and discoveries afterwards!*



## When to Leave?

It is generally easier to hitchhike during the week than during the weekend, because of traffic patterns. A lot of business travelers drive alone and are ready to take on another passenger to make the ride seem shorter. There are also usually more trucks on the road during the week because in some countries, regular trucks can't ride on Sundays (apart from the ones carrying fresh/perishable goods). Finally, weekends are generally a time for families to go out (and their cars are really stuffed) and for Sunday drivers (literally - think of your grandparents).

- ☛ The earlier the better, and usually the faster (apart from morning traffic). Hitchhiking by daylight is also safer than at nighttime, **no matter what time it really is**. Be aware of seasonal variations (days shorter during winter) and your current latitude (variations are wider in Norway than in Morocco).

- ☛ If your journey is long, you increase your risk of having to hitchhike during nighttime or sleep on the road. Make sure you have proper equipment! If you have to cross a border, also be aware of their opening hours and of the usual waiting time.

## Speed, Distance and Duration

It's always tricky to try to estimate a hitcher's speed. It depends on many factors:

- **Your gender and how many hitchers:** a woman usually gets rides faster than a man (huh, big surprise there!) The lone traveler also gets rides more easily.
- **Your technique:** active hitchhiking (direct solicitation) has only half the waiting time of passive hitchhiking. If you choose to hitch with trucks, note that their speed is limited to 90 km/h on European motorways.
- **Your starting point:** it's sometimes necessary to walk a few kilometers, take a detour or take public transportation to reach an efficient, logical and legal hitchhiking spot out of town.
- **The road system configuration:** you will be slower in a complex road system, if there are many possible directions and if the population density is high. Also consider the type and the condition of the road, since in some countries the effective driving speed may be rather low, even on main traffic axes. Road works or extreme climate conditions can also slow down the vehicle flow.
- **Date, day and time:** national holidays, festivals, demonstrations, etc.
- **Personal variables:** your look, your facial hair, your karma, your approach, your (absence of) linguistic skills, etc.

*No more than three hitchers!  
If you are a group, it's better to divide it into couples (boy-girl).*

No matter what your experience level is, you may remain stuck somewhere or become a victim of unforeseeable events. A longer and more complex journey means a higher randomness factor. As far as is possible, anticipate the unpredictable, have a plan B and give yourself extra time.

## Useful Equipment

- **Appropriate clothing:** in order to face the elements while you are waiting, wear your clothes in layers, making sure to take a wind-breaker and/or a raincoat. A high-visibility (fluorescent) jacket will increase your chances of being seen while adding an extra touch of professionalism. “Looking clean” is a distinct feature: you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. **For women**, remember that your clothes should help potential drivers to classify you in the “long-haul traveler” category, not in the “prostitute” one. Cover your legs and shoulders, and wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes.
- **Compact and clean backpack:** it's easier to keep a small backpack with you, thus reducing the chances of losing your belongings or getting them stolen. A backpack identifies you as a traveler and reassures people. Get a rainproof backpack or a backpack cover - not only will you protect your belongings adequately, but you will also avoid dirtying the next vehicle...
- **Food and liquids:** make sure to bring enough water! Food costs a small fortune on motorways, so carry some healthy snacks, ideally things you can offer to share with your driver. **Winning ideas:** chocolate, nuts, dried fruits, bread, sweets that can make you smile when you get moody... **To avoid:** things that leak, that spoil quickly, crumble or smell strongly...
- **Sign and permanent marker:** see next section.
- **Cash:** can give you some flexibility in case of emergency, or to take public transportation.
- **Map of the region:** the ideal scale depends of your planned journey, but it should indicate at least service areas and motorway/highway exits whilst allowing you to locate alternative routes.
- **Mobile phone and other gadgets (GPS, PDA, international calling card, etc.):** useful in case of emergency and to find a local plan B. Presentation file with travel pictures, maps, a gift bag and other neo-nomadic tools.

*In cold weather, you might want to pack self-heating pouches (foot or hand warmers) to slip in your boots/shoes or gloves. They can keep you warmer for a few hours (up to 12 for some of them).*

*Make sure you adapt your equipment to the climate!*

## Sign or No Sign?

Not only do the opinions on this matter differ, but the advice varies according to the country and the circumstances. The choice is yours!

- ✓ People can't guess your destination right before a junction or if the road network is complex
- ✓ You can write down your destination if you're unable to pronounce it
- ✓ You can write down something funny such as *Tokyo* or *Paradise*, which will make you look congenial
- ✓ Shows you're organized, which reassures people
- ✗ Discourages people who are not going as far as your destination from picking you up, even if they could give you a very useful ride
- ✗ People don't really have the time to read your sign, and a big sign takes up quite a bit of space
- ✗ Makes it difficult to refuse a ride by saying it is not going far enough or is too out of the way
- ✗ Is not very useful when prompting people actively, like at night-time

A sign is normally made of **cardboard, size A4 or more**, rigid enough not to bend in the wind. It should not necessarily display the destination, but rather the most logical direction. It proves useful to have several signs, especially if there are major cities on your route. If you intend to cover a large distance, carry with you a **permanent marker** with a large chisel tip, or even many of them in different colors, the idea being that you'll be able to make more signs as you go. You can also carry the cardboard pieces or hope to find them on your way.

**How to write a sign:** calculate the space you'll need for each letter before you start writing the destination (to avoid having an unreadable last syllable) and learn to abbreviate the place the way locals would. In some languages, you can leave out vowels and keep only the consonants, for example "FRNKFRT" will be understood as Frankfurt. Don't forget to use the local spelling as much as possible!

For example, a sign "NL" (Netherlands) or "DK" (Denmark) might be good enough when hitchhiking from Hamburg, but might not be understood around Budapest. Similarly, "PERPI" is clearly Perpignan when you are in Toulouse, but will hardly be understood around Madrid...

***Build a practical tool***

*Insert a piece of cardboard in a transparent A4 sheet protector, then put a couple of blank sheets of paper in there as well. You will have material to create high-contrast waterproof signs as you go and can even fold it in half while you are traveling. You could also make it A3-sized and fold it.*

## Your First Time

- When starting, begin with short and simple routes (<300 km) during daytime and starting from well-known spots. As you gain experience, you'll develop your own style, learn to estimate a trip's length accurately and consequently increase the length of your journeys.
- Many beginners feel safer starting with a hitchhiking "angel" or "godparent" - someone with experience - that can introduce them to the technique while limiting the stress associated with a first time. Try to join a hitchhiking forum or community to find someone to accompany you!
- If you choose to go alone, follow your instinct and learn to say no when you don't feel at ease with your potential ride, or when it's not really helpful (short distance, uncertain route, no service station before the interchange, etc.)
- From the moment a car pulls over, don't waste your time and try not to make your driver wait, but don't put yourself in a dangerous situation either. Be **alert, quick, and courteous**.

*Refrain from smoking or eating while you are waiting as it could bother potential drivers. If you need to eat, do it discreetly.*

# The Art of Getting Dropped

**Choose the best spot from which to hitch:** if your driver can't take you all the way to your final destination, try to find out where the last gas station is. Avoid at all cost being dropped off a city center!

**Avoid leaving the motorway (if relevant):** in some countries, service stations are located directly on the motorway and it's possible to hitch huge distances by "service station-hopping", especially if you know which are the ones that are best located. Note that if your ride isn't going to the city center but only to the suburbs, you can probably get a direct ride to the center by hitchhiking from the last service station before it.

**Be careful with your luggage!:** make sure you don't forget your backpack or give your driver an opportunity to "forget" about it. Never close the car door before opening the back door (if your backpack is on the backseat) and say loudly "just a moment, let me get my backpack". What seems obvious isn't always, and it's not your driver's responsibility to remember that you have luggage with you.

*Try to make things as easy as possible for your driver – plan the drop-off spot in advance. Do not hesitate to mention your best option to your drivers, especially if this option does not require any major effort on their end.*

# Shattering the Myths: Risks and Hardships

## **Car Accidents**

As with any road means of transportation, accidents are the main risk the hitchhiker faces. Because you have no control over the vehicle, there is very little you can do to lower the risk. The basic rules are:

- Never hitchhike where it's dangerous for a car to stop
- Buckle your safety belt
- Be aware of the road and help the driver to stay alert by:
  - learning to be silent when driving is more critical;
  - bringing unexpected elements to your driver's attention;
  - agreeing on a safe drop-off point in advance.
- Insist on being dropped off at a safe spot, or at least a spot where it is safe to stop
- If the driver drives dangerously or abuses drugs and/or alcohol, mention you are uncomfortable, insist that he/she modifies his/her driving, suggest that you drive (if you have a valid license) or find a way to leave the vehicle early (see section "Leaving the Vehicle")



## Getting Lost or Dropped Off Far Away

It is likely that you won't know the region in which you choose to hitchhike well, whereas your drivers will. To avoid getting stuck in a remote place and being confused about the next direction to take:

- Be aware of the route your driver is taking and if there is any irregularity, try to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.
- Carry a map of the area (indicating where the service stations are).
- Have some knowledge of alternative routes.
- Negotiate the drop-off point and in case of doubt, ask your driver to point it out on the map.
- Be prepared to be firm if you believe that the suggested drop-off point isn't adequate, even if they insist that they know the area well.
- In case of any problems, ask for help!

*There are few reliable or recent statistics on the real risk level associated with hitchhiking. Most available information on the topic consists of reports of absolute crimes reported to the police rather than a relative estimate of the percentage of "bad experiences". There is very little data on hitchhiking as a whole, as a means of transportation. How many people do it? How often? What proportion of them are men, women? What distance do they cover, and at what speed? So many questions don't have a clear answer... But there is some consensus, and there are some clear trends which that are reflected in the advice normally given to novice hitchhikers by experienced ones.*

## Becoming Victim of a Crime

The nature of hitchhiking places the hitcher in a vulnerable position.

### Individual Factors

- **Gender:** women are more at risk than men are, primarily when it comes to sexual offenses. Men more often experience/are more at risk when it comes to theft or robbery (with or without violence).
- **Experience:** capacity to handle and redirect the relationship with the driver, attitude, knowledge of self-defense techniques.
- **Language skills:** capacity to communicate efficiently with the driver.
- **Physical appearance:** clothes, physical constitution, etc.

### Itinerary-Related Factors

- **Number of people hitchhiking:** hitchhikers traveling in pairs face about ten times less crime than solo travelers
- **Time of the day:** most incidents happen after 6PM.
- **Distance :** short or intra-city journeys are riskier than long distances.

### Regional & Human Factors

- Type and frequency of local crime
- Perception of hitchhiking
- Perception of the stranger.
- Current events
- Driver and other passengers

# Safety Advice

## For Everyone

The following is an overview of most advice given to hitchhikers discussing their advantages and their downsides. We do not endorse any specific advice – you have to choose for yourself which one seems to apply to you and makes you feel more comfortable!

**Do not tolerate it when someone crosses your boundaries repeatedly.** Command respect, and try to leave the vehicle if anything seems to be amiss.

✓ You won't be perceived as a victim, and can prevent a situation from going awry.

✗ Easier said than done, requires strong mental preparation.

**Travel light (small or no backpack).** Keep your backpack as close to you as possible. Avoid putting it in the car trunk.

✓ Allows you to get out of tricky situations quickly without risking losing personal belongings. Makes it easier to get into smaller cars without parting from your luggage.

✗ Can cause misunderstandings for women in some countries where hitchhikers are confused with prostitutes. It can be tricky to clarify the situation without a proper knowledge of the local language.

**Follow your intuition:** if anything “feels” wrong, do not get in the car. Quickly assess the vehicle and the driver. Learn to decline ride offers!

✓ Uses subconscious intelligence to analyze details that one can't rationally notice or explain. In a few seconds, it's the best one can do.

✗ Intuition isn't foolproof; neither are prejudices. Also, it can be very hard to refuse if you're not used to it.

**Keep all your faculties intact** (no alcohol, no drugs). Avoid setting out on a journey when you are emotionally weak or very tired.

✓ It's important to remain alert in order to react swiftly in case a problem arises, and in order not to be perceived as a potential victim.

✗ Real people have real flaws, and we sometimes party too much before leaving a place, and sleeping more means leaving later...

**Control the situation**, do not let the topic drift to sensitive issues – change topics or confront the driver. Do not believe that silence and non-verbal speak for themselves and say “No” firmly and assertively.

✓ Not being perceived as a potential victim. This way, you put things out in the open and avoid misunderstandings.

✗ Requires some guts and experience. Could be perceived as being blunt or impolite.

**Locate emergency exits**, know how to lock and unlock the car door.

✓ Reassures you regarding your possibilities to quickly leave the vehicle.

✗ Panicking or abusing emergency exit techniques can lead to tricky or dangerous situations. Hard to apply practically.

**Ask the driver** about his/her destination before telling him/her yours.

✓ Gives you the opportunity to refuse the ride offer if you find it suspicious: say they're not going far enough, it's the wrong direction, etc.

✗ It's rather hard to justify a refusal when hitchhiking with a sign...



## **Specific Advice for Women**

### **Avoid cars with more than one man inside.**

✓ Easier to get out of the situation when there is only one person to analyze or confront.

✗ Longer waiting time if all these offers are systematically refused.

### **Show your intentions clearly.**

✓ This way, you avoid frustration or disappointment on the part of drivers that expect sexual "compensation". It shows you're self-confident.

✗ Requires courage.

**Ask questions about family, appeal to the driver's values.** Invent a fake husband. Pretend someone's waiting for you tonight and that you will hitch with that person from tomorrow on (today being an exception).

✓ Introduces you as a respectable person, not an easy girl nor a hooker...

✗ Sometimes involves lying.

**Carry a self-defense weapon with you,** pepper spray, etc...

✓ Gives self-confidence and a potential advantage in case of physical aggression.

✗ Illegal to carry and use against people in many countries. A car is a confined space in which a weapon can easily be turned against you. High risk of car accident.

**In case of a problem, threaten to jump,** to set the vehicle on fire, pull the hand break or the gear stick...

✓ Guaranteed psychological effect.

✗ High risk of accident. Hard to judge such a radical action is really necessary or if you're not projecting your fears onto the situation.

**Never hitchhike alone.**

✓ Hitchhiking alone has ten times the risk factor of hitchhiking with someone else.

✗ Not really flexible nor autonomous, slower.

**Take note of the license plate number and prepare an SMS** ready to be sent to a friend in case of a problem. Take a picture of the license plate and send it to a friend.

✓ Shows you are organized, can be extremely helpful in case of an arising issue.

✗ Hard to apply practically because there is very little time between the moment the vehicle stops and when you get in. Hard to remember the license plate number. Forces you to show expensive gadgets to the driver.

## Leaving a Vehicle

If you are intimidated by a driver and feel like you're losing control of the situation, it is better to leave the vehicle than to let the situation get out of hand. The ideal is always to be dropped off at a place where you can hitch back without any major problems, but if you feel like you're in danger, it's better to get out of the car, period.

- Above all, don't panic! Be determined to leave the vehicle and don't start picturing the worst that can happen. Keep a cool head and detach emotionally from the situation. Your judgement is very important at that precise moment and no every set of circumstances is unique.
- Tell your driver that you'd like to get out at the next service station, next exit, next junction or at the next spot where he/she can pull over safely. Be very firm, but remain calm and polite.
- If it makes you feel better, you can give a short explanation to the driver such as "I'm not feeling well" or "I have my period", nothing elaborate. You could make up something else, but keep it simple to avoid getting stuck in a complex explanation. Remain focused.
- If the situation really turns sour, it can become necessary to assert yourself, threaten to jump or act. In any case, remember that the person is driving, and that **your main risk is getting involved in a car accident.**
- Know the emergency hotline number and don't be afraid to use it.

*Avoid jumping out of the car at all cost! It is extremely difficult not to fall back on the vehicle while jumping, and your chances of survival are slim over 50 km/h. It is an **absolute last resort** only to be used **when the chance of getting killed is higher when staying than when jumping.** If you ever get in that situation, first apply the handbrake. Aim for a place where the ground is softer (soil, grass), bow your head and cross your arms across your head and chest to protect your vital parts. Jump as far as possible to the side, rolling away from the road. But we repeat and insist that we do not recommend doing this at all: it's way too dangerous.*

# Variations on a Theme

## **With Pets**

Hitchhiking with a dog? Not that complicated if the pet cooperates! Many drivers would normally never have picked you up, but with the dog... it's different! Experienced dog-hitchers claim that the waiting time doesn't vary much whether there is an animal or not, but opinions differ. However, there is no advantage with a smaller animal: you have to make it clear that you are carrying an animal before getting in the car, so that the driver has the option to refuse.

## **Long Distance and Night Hitchhiking**

If you are already reasonably experienced and ready to take the risk, hitchhiking large distances can be a rewarding challenge, both physically and mentally. Tiredness, cold, lack of water and hygiene facilities are felt more intensely when traveling long journeys. The key to long distance hitchhiking is to find long and secure rides during which you can rest, and to make sure you're dropped off at a proper spot.

**Traveling non-stop:** solicit rides actively from one service station to another. A lot of drivers pick up hitchhikers to help them stay awake, especially at night.

*Learn to rest without sleeping, by closing your eyes for a few minutes, but warning the driver first. If it poses a problem, they'll wake you up.*

**Getting hosted or camping on the road:** spontaneous offers are common, but unpredictable. Depending on the season and latitude, you can choose to sleep out in the open, setting up your hammock, tarp, tent... Make sure to be resourceful in case things do not turn out as planned.

**Proper mindset:** on long-distance trips, the human dimension becomes more prominent, each encounter blooming into a unique magical moment. It is crucial to prepare yourself mentally to go beyond seeing the



experience as merely a “means of transportation” and to let yourself get carried by this real-life adventure.

**With truck drivers:** on a long-distance itinerary, it is useful to know the major truck routes. If you are at a motorway service station, note that most trucks are now equipped with a second fold-a-bed (almost all in the European Economical Area). Trucks are slow (maximum speed of 90 km/h, a 30 min break every four and a half hours), but reliable. Also, note that except on Saturday nights in some countries (because of truck driving on Sundays being prohibited), truck stops are generally good spots to leave from. It is necessary to understand the way truck drivers ‘think’ before riding with them. Most awkward experiences come from avoidable misunderstandings. A truck driver doesn't think much in terms of time, but rather in terms “route”. You should not only ask them **where** they are going, but **when** they are getting there (it could be in 3 days!). Where are you going **tonight**? When is your next break?

*Truck drivers are too often misunderstood by hitchhikers, despite being probably most able to help you when hitchhiking long distances. They are relatively lonely and appreciate company. They can jabber in a few languages and often share their food. The road is their job and their life, their route is often controlled and their truck makes them rather easy to identify, making them a safer choice. Dare to approach them, while taking the usual precautions for your safety. Respect them. Remember that they are just like you, professionals of the road with a reputation they often do not deserve.*

Useful material for nighttime hitchhiking:

**High visibility clothes** – florescent vest, reflective gear, etc.

**Flashlight** – a headlamp will allow you to have your hands free

**Flashing bicycle lights** – can help you signal your presence to drivers while walking or soliciting rides

**Camping equipment** – if required



## More Resources on Hitchhiking

<http://hitchwiki.org/en/>

<http://digi hitch.com/>

<http://www.hitchbase.com/>

(mainly in German, but some spots in English)  
Legal Guide to Hitchhiking in the USA

<http://guides.digi hitch.com/laws>

Neo-Nomad Collective • [www.neo-nomad.org](http://www.neo-nomad.org)



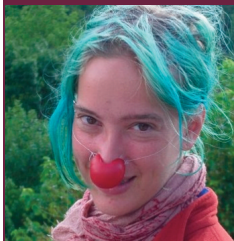
Nans Thomassey

After a Civil Engineering Degree specialized in Sustainable Building, Nans started vagabonding in 2008 through the Americas on a quest new ways of travelling. Using the hidden potential of the modern world, on the look out for authenticity, adventure and consciousness, enjoying each kilometer he wanders on, he encounters the unknown on an adventure where life became an experimental playground...



Guillaume Charroin

Following a Master's Degree in Sustainable Tourism Management, Guillaume made a dream come true by setting on a journey with his old friend Nans. Cycling, hitchhiking (cars, boats, planes), kayaking, climbing cliffs and mountains, all he can think of is to hit the road... while harnessing the risks! Traveling became his lifestyle and he learned to adapt to every situation.



Anick-Marie Bouchard

When she left "home" in 2002, Anick-Marie never thought the trip would last so long. Since then, she studied in four different countries, learned three more languages, hitchhiked over 30 000 km on three continents and volunteered for the Safety Team of hospitality exchange network CouchSurfing.org